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Lore of the Meadowland



SHORT STUDIES IN KENTUCKIANA

By JOHN WILSON TOWNSEND

LORE OF THE MEADOWLAND

Lore of the Meadowland

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JOHN WILSON TOWNSEND

AUTHOR OF

"RICHARD HICKMAN MENEFEE"

"KENTUCKIANS IN HISTORY AND LITERATURE"

"LIFE OF JAMES FRANCIS LEONARD"

"KENTUCKY: MOTHER OF GOVERNORS," ETC.

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TO
JAMES LANE ALLEN
AFFECTIONATELY

A NOTE.

Contrary to public impression, Kentucky does not mean "dark and bloody ground," but it is a word originally used by the Iroquois Indians to signify the "hunting grounds;" or, a much better word, "meadowland." This in justification of my title.

"Lore of the Meadowland" may be considered as sort of a sequel to my "Kentuckians in History and Literature," a book, I trust, that is not as bad as its name. At any rate, it found favor with quite a number of readers, and its companion is now sent forth with the hope (as all first-book authors have it) that it, too, may prove worth while, and finally find an humble place in the great world of books.

J. W. T.

Lexington, Ky.,
February 25, 1911.

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Two hundred and fifty copies of this pamphlet were
printed in April, 1911, of which this is number

HORACE HOLLEY, LL. D.

The Third President of Old Transylvania

[Read upon the Celebration of the One Hundred and Thirtieth Anniversary of His Birth, in Morrison College, on February 14, 1911.]

One hundred and thirty years ago yesterday, Horace Holley was born. In a most direct line he was descended from the famous Edmund Halley, the English astronomer, whose comet, like many another good thing, went wrong last year. The American founder of his family, John Holley, was one of the big men of Seventeenth century Connecticut; and his father, Luther Holley, was a business man of ability, around whose memory lingers the excellent tradition that he, like Lord Macaulay, could repeat the whole of "Paradise Lost." Horace Holley's mother was Sarah Dakin, one of the Dresden china type of women, reminding one of a delicate piece of porcelain. And these two, Luther and Sarah (Dakin) Holley, were not only the parents of him whom we remember to-day, but of their eldest son, Myron Holley, the famous New England reformer, occupying a larger place in American history than does his younger brother.

The little town of Salisbury, Connecticut, is the place, and February 13, 1781, is the date of Horace Holley's birth. In school before he was four years old and finishing it when he was ten, Horace spent the next three or four years in study at home and in business with his father. His mind becoming more and more engrossed in intellectual pursuits, it was finally decided to give him a college edu-

tion. So, in 1797, at the age of sixteen years, he entered the preparatory department of Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts. Here he spent two years, at the end of which time he went to New Haven and matriculated as a Freshman at Yale. Yale was then flourishing under the auspices of its great President, Timothy Dwight, and the brilliant youngster and the old poet-president became boon companions, a friendship that was only terminated with Dwight's death. Holley was an excellent student, besides being one of the best speakers in the college, and the social star of the town. In 1803, as the class orator, the degree of Bachelor of Arts was conferred upon him.

The great religious revival that swept over New Haven in 1803, found many converts in the men of Yale; and among them, as you have anticipated, was Horace Holley. This awakening left its impress upon him, and, though he went to New York City soon after graduation to study law in the office of Riggs and Radcliff, he could not get away from his conversion, if we may so term it. For several months he devoted himself assiduously to the law, but it soon became so distasteful to him that he gave it up and returned to New Haven to study theology under President Dwight. Though bred a strict Calvinist, Holley soon became a Unitarian as exemplified in the teachings of William Ellery Channing and the other New England preachers of this faith. He pursued his studies with great enthusiasm and rapidly finished his course.

On January 1, 1805, Horace Holley married Mary Austin, of New Haven, who was to afterward become his best biographer, and the author of the well-known "History of Texas." From their union two children were born, the eldest of whom died some ten years ago.

On September 13, of this same year of 1805, Holley was ordained at Greenfield Hill, Connecticut—the lovely little town that Dwight celebrated in his pastoral poem of that name, a poem that was read more a century ago than it is to-day—by the Western Consociation of Fairfield County, Connecticut; and the Society "voted to give Mr.

Holley five hundred and sixty dollars per year for his services in the ministry, so long as said society and Mr. Holley could agree." For three years they did agree, at the end of which time the pastor, looking for fairer financial fields, let his eyes behold Marblehead, Massachusetts, but, after a few weeks, he pronounced it not good, and decided to look further. Middletown, Connecticut, and Albany, New York, made him offers, which he declined, and descended upon Boston. There he preached in the Old South church to crowded congregations for a time. After several trial sermons, which were declared excellent, the great Hollis Street Unitarian church invited him to become its pastor, and this he did.

Installed on March 8, 1809, Holley spent the next nine years of his life, the most pleasant years he was to spend in the world, as pastor of this church. There was a thorough and most cordial understanding and sympathy between minister and people, and we may well believe that he was happy.

It was while at Hollis Street, that to all intents and purposes, Holley admitted to a company of clergymen his disbelief in the divinity of Christ to the extent "that the being," as he phrased it, "called Jesus Christ, who lived, and walked about, and ate, and drank, and died, on this earth, was verily the eternal God, the great First Cause of all things." And then to illustrate what a nice mind he had, he said in a sermon, "What is Christian faith? The intelligent and honest acknowledgment that Jesus is the Christ. What is the term of Christian communion in the article of faith? The same acknowledgment that Jesus is the Christ." This distinction is one of the paradoxies of Unitarianism, you may say, and you may be right! Of course, in this he denied the doctrine of the trinity; and he clave unto all the other principles of his church. Truth was what he most desired, and if he saw it in Unitarianism, why, that was his affair, not ours. Surely, though, we can all come in on his definition of religion as the love of God

and man, as it is the same definition that the Savior gave centuries ago.

Besides his pastoral duties, Holley was a member of the Board of Overseers of Harvard College, of the Boston school committee, and of many other literary and benevolent institutions. To all of them he gave himself unstintingly.

And then, at the acme of his power as one of the great pulpit orators of the whole country, when his influence for good was greatest, like a bolt from the blue he heard the call of the wild, the great West began its pounding in his pulses, a pounding that never ceased until he went to the undiscovered country.

In 1815 Dr. Holley—for he was now wearing the degree of Doctor of Laws—was elected to the presidency of Transylvania University, but he was then wise enough to ignore the siren's voice. The Trustees camped on his trail, however, and, in November, 1817, he was again unanimously invited to accept the office. Their perseverance, perhaps as much as anything else, kindled his curiosity, and so, in March of the following year, he left Boston for the capitol of Blue Grass Kentucky. He stopped in Washington, where he met many members of Congress, and delighted them with his power as a preacher (and, by the way, we want to remember that Holley was a man of great eloquence, a genuine orator). Journeying through Virginia he visited in Richmond, and then tarried awhile with Jefferson at charming "Monticello."

Arrived in Lexington he was greeted with real acclaim as the one man who could bring sanity and wisdom, which spelled success, into the management of the university. Carefully considering the institution, the town, the country, Holley sent his acceptance to the Board on April 7; and a short time thereafter they met and unanimously elected him president of Transylvania.

While in this city looking over the field, Dr. Holley wrote some very delightful letters home, and from one of these we desire to read this:

"LEXINGTON, May 27th, 1818.

"The town and vicinity are very handsome. The streets are broad, straight, paved, clean, and have rows of trees on each side. The houses are of brick almost universally, many of them in the midst of fields, and have a very rural and charming appearance. The taste is for low houses, generally two, sometimes even but one story high, like English cottages.

"In the afternoon I walked about town with Mr. Clay, and called at a few charming houses. I visited also the Athenæum, an institution not yet furnished with many books, but well supplied with newspapers, and the best periodicals. I find everything of this sort, which is valuable, from Boston and the other Atlantic cities.

"This morning I breakfasted at Mr. Clay's, who lives a mile and a half from town. He arrived here only three days before me. Ashland is a very pleasant place, handsomer than I anticipated. The grounds are beautiful, the lawns and walks extensive, the shrubbery luxuriant, and the garden well supplied. The native forest of ash in the rear adds a charming effect to the whole. After breakfast Mr. Clay rode with me and we went with the trustees, by appointment, to the college to visit the professors and students. They were all collected in the largest hall to receive us. I made a short address, which was received in a kind manner. I was then conducted to the library, the apparatus, and the recitation rooms. The library is small, and the apparatus smaller. There is no regular division of students into classes as in other colleges, and but few laws. Everything is to be done and so much the better, as nothing is to be reformed. Almost the whole is proposed to be left to me to arrange. I am now making all necessary inquiries, and a meeting of the trustees is to be called next week.

"After this visit, I went with a party of ladies and gentlemen nine miles into the country to the seat of Colonel [William] Mead [situated just off the Harrodsburg pike], where we dined and passed the day. This gentleman, who

is near seventy, is a Virginian of the old school. He has been a good deal in England in his youth, and brought home with him English notions of a country seat, though he is a great republican in politics. He and his wife dress in the costume of the olden time. He has the square coat and green cuffs, the vest of the court, short breeches, and white stockings, at all times. Mrs. Mead has the long waist, the white apron, the stays, the ruffles about the elbows, and the cap of half a century ago. She is very mild and ladylike, and though between sixty and seventy, plays upon the piano-forte with the facility and cheerfulness of a young lady. Her husband resembles Colonel Pickering in the face and the shape of the head. He is entirely a man of leisure, never having followed any business, and never using his fortune but in adorning his place and entertaining his friends and strangers. No word is ever sent to him that company is coming. To do so offends him. But a dinner—he dines at the hour of four—is always ready for visitors; and servants are always in waiting. "Twenty of us went out to-day without warning, and were entertained luxuriously on the viands of the country. Our drink consisted of beer, toddy and water. Wine, being imported and expensive, he never gives; nor does he allow cigars to be smoked in his presence. His house consists of a cluster of rustic cottages, in front of which spreads a beautiful, sloping lawn as smooth as velvet. From this diverge, in various directions, and forming vistas terminated by picturesque objects, groves and walks extending over some acres. Seats, Chinese temples, verdant banks and alcoves are interspersed at convenient distances. The lake, over which presides a Grecian temple, that you may imagine to be the residence of the water nymphs, has in it a small island, which communicates with the shore by a white bridge of one arch. The whole is surrounded by a low rustic fence of stone, surmounted and almost hidden by honeysuckle and roses, now in full flower, and which we gathered in abundance to adorn the ladies. Everything is laid out for walking and pleasure. His farm he rents, and does

nothing for profit. The whole is in rustic taste. You enter from the road, through a gate between rude and massive columns, a field without pretension, wind a considerable distance through a noble park to an inner gate, the capitals to whose pillars are unique, being formed of the roots of trees, carved by nature. The rich scene of cultivation, of verdure and flower-capped hedges, bursts upon you. There is no establishment like this in our country. Instead of a description, I might have given you its name, 'Chaumiere du Prairies.' "

Wouldn't you like to know what part, if any, this great lord of the land played in the little tragedy we are now about to stage, which may be entitled "The Power of Darkness?"

Immediately after his election, Holley informed the Hollis Street church of his determination, and he travelled home at once to make preparations for the removal of his family. He preached a great valedictory sermon to his congregation, gathered his family around him, together with two graduates of Harvard, and in September he was off again for Kentucky. He arrived in Lexington in the late autumn, and his presence was welcomed by the illumination of the college building, and many other manifestations of great joy.

On December 19, 1818, Dr. Holley was inaugurated as third President of Transylvania University, and he at once entered upon the arduous task of converting a grammar school into a university. He had everything to plan, but he set himself to the work like the wonderful man he was. His heart and soul he dedicated on Transylvania's altar.

In order to get the proper perspective, we must go back a bit. Transylvania University is the result of the consolidation of two preparatory schools: Transylvania Seminary of Lexington, founded in 1785, and Kentucky Academy of Pisgah, founded in 1795. The union of these two took place in 1798, and the next year the Rev. James Moore, the famous flute-playing parson, whom Mr. James Lane Allen has so exquisitely interwoven into his Kentucky tales and ro-

mances, became the first president of the infant University.

President Moore, though a most charming gentleman, was not a great college president. So, after five years, he was succeeded by Dr. James Blythe, a man more interested in the chemistry of matter than in the matter of men. President Blythe continued as head of the University in embryo for fourteen years, during which time he succeeded most admirably in keeping it in all sorts of religious tangles and warm controversies of various kinds. The curriculum was a pathetic joke, and during the first twenty years of its existence, that is throughout the reigns of the parson and the physician, the little college graduated exactly twenty-two men.

The Kentucky Presbyterians seemed to think that the University belonged to them, and with their abominable sectarianism they had torn the institution well-nigh asunder. Though the State legislature ousted their board and elected a new board composed of several of the distinguished men of the Commonwealth, who were anxious to work hand in hand with Holley, they yet endeavored to hold on to the University: the Lexington Presbyterians were the last to welcome the new president, and an Ohio Presbyterian weekly was always his harshest critic. Centre College of Danville is a most magnificent memorial to the Holley crusade. This is history, not prejudice.

President Holley, having partly finished the work of regeneration and overhauling, within three years students from all over the Mississippi Valley were crowding the halls of the institution; the intellectual life of the whole Western people was quickened; European gazetters began to refer to Lexington as the seat of Transylvania University, "The Athens of the West"—a sobriquet that Horace Holley had more to do with winning for this city than even the mighty Henry Clay. The future was indeed bright; State and Church in the administration of Transylvania seemed to be at last separated; the new president was, as we put it to-day, "making good." His faculty was composed of famous men, at the head of whom stood Constantine Samuel Rafin-

esque, the scientist and historian, "the most learned man in America," to revive the characterization of his contemporaries.

It was not long, however, and more's the pity, before President Holley had raised up a coterie of enemies determined to destroy him. These enemies, in many instances the recipients of hospitality in home and kindnesses from his hand, began to circulate all sorts of silly stories about the man, the preacher, the professor, and the president. He had a small bust of a Grecian goddess in the nude in his home, and because it "was not covered to the very ears in an 'inky cloak,' it was 'worse poison to men's souls' than a pagan idol, or a 'Druid's oak.'" This was one of the proofs that Dr. Holley was no Christian! Of course, his maligners were ignorant of the views of the Unitarian, and so again, of course, Holley was an infidel, a most dangerous instructor of youth. The government of the University was represented to be lax, the students an idle, dissipated set of ne'er-do-wells; the University was a "rich man's institution," and, if it were, it could not well be otherwise with practically no endowment or State aid. And so, with damning falsehood, denunciation, malice—all "modes of moral assassination" known to men, were used to dethrone the character of Transylvania's great president.

Holley's mistake in dealing with his enemies was this: like the Standard Oil Company, he maintained a "dignified silence," seldom replying to pamphlet, newspaper or magazine criticisms, or public denunciation, hoping always, and always in vain, to "kill false accusations with silence." His enemies, like the very dogs of war, were united; he stood alone, with only an occasional friend to speak a word for him in printer's ink. His wife thought that he should have established "an academical paper," which, wisely conducted, would most probably have saved him and the University he loved so well. Dr. Holley did not seem to realize with Joseph Addison that "envy is a tax which a man owes to his contemporaries for the privilege of being dis-

tinguished;" and had he done so, the end of this story would be more remote.

A tactless political speech, delivered by one of the students, and without the president's knowledge; the denunciation of an unspeakable Desha, whom the people of this State were at one time so unfortunate as to elect Governor of Kentucky; and the accumulated criticisms of a half-dozen years, convinced Holley that he was not appreciated and he decided to resign. Nine of the best years of his life were given to Transylvania, his "favorite foster-child." In January, 1826, he had asked the Board of Trustees to accept his resignation, but they declined to do so. Now, however, in the early spring of 1827, he insisted that his resignation take immediate effect; and it was done.

In making his final report to the Trustees, President Holley pointed out some interesting facts. During the session just closing two hundred and eighty-six students were matriculated in the University; attention was called to the excellent condition of the grounds and buildings—"in the whole establishment there is not a pane of glass out;"—the condition of the libraries, apparatus, and cabinet, was noted; the course of study was wisely commented upon; the number of degrees conferred from the beginning of his incumbency (1818) to the present time (1827): six hundred and sixty, forty of which were honorary, as against the twenty-two that were granted from 1802 to 1818; some of the wants of the University: the revival of the law school; chairs of French and Spanish; a gymnasium; a provision to increase the libraries; an art gallery.

This resignation and report was dated "Lexington, March 24, 1827," and, if all other evidence were lacking, this alone would prove Holley's great worth and success as a college president, and, also, that he was thinking fifty years or more in advance of his time; but, because he saw no harm in a horse race, a toddy, a dance, a hearty laugh, an excellent theatrical performance; because, in sooth, he was "a good fellow," believing that it was quite possible for one to keep Christ in one's heart without wearing crepe

on one's countenance, his power as a pulpit orator, his wonderful work for Transylvania, all, all his series of signal successes were forgotten, and he was utterly damned!

Speaking for the Board of Trustees, old John Bradford, Kentucky's pioneer journalist, penned these prophetic sentences: "Within the walls of Transylvania the fond recollections of her polite, kind, generous, learned, accomplished and much loved President will never perish. The patronage of the Commonwealth may be withdrawn, the institution may decline, the walls themselves may be crumbled; but so long as the name remains there will be associated with it the most affectionate remembrances that flow from mutual attachments, or have a habitation in the hearts of those who are susceptible of the emotions of gratitude. To whatever clime your destiny may direct you, you will be pursued by the esteem and confidence of those who have been so long and so intimately associated with you, and whom we on this occasion represent. Farewell."

A valedictory address must, of course, be delivered to his friends, and in this two-hour discourse he touched upon everything from his report to the trustees to females, happiness, immortality, politics, and his return. He seems to have held, like many another man, that he "could come back."

Leaving Lexington on March 27, 1827, he was accompanied by his friends and admirers for several miles out of town, the last expression of their love and esteem.

Holley had a dream for the sons of the Southern planters, and it was this: he desired to take a goodly company of them to Europe, living most of the time in Paris, and then to educate them with books and travel on the continent and in England. He went to New Orleans, where he hoped to gather his boys together, and to sail from that port. On arriving in New Orleans, however, he found himself welcomed almost as cordially as he had been in Lexington some ten years before. He was offered the Presidency of the re-organized College of New Orleans, and he at once accepted it abandoning his idea for the sons of the

planters at the same time. The Louisianians exhibited unlimited faith in the late President of Transylvania, practically agreeing to build him a university, and then, if he would only accept it, to ultimately present it to him. He acceded to their wishes and at once set the wheels of regeneration into motion.

But the summer wore on apace, and it is a deal warmer on Canal street than it is on Market. Holley, exhausted with work and overcome with lassitude, finally decided to drop the rein for awhile and take a long rest. Passage on the packet "Louisiana" was engaged, and the tedious trip to New York City was begun. For the first few days all went well, and then, "Yellow fever aboard!" was the awful cry. Holley was stricken, and on the last day of July, 1827, he died. His body was consigned to the waters of the Gulf of Mexico; but the flight of years seem to serve as guardians of a memory perennially green.

And this, my friends, is the imperfect tale of the years of Horace Holley, the famous, the much-maligned President of old Transylvania.

KENTUCKY'S DUNBAR

Joseph Seamon Cotter

Let no catholic-minded Kentuckian point the finger of scorn at me because I see fit to make an appreciative note on Joseph S. Cotter, the Louisville Negro poet. If one will read the two lyrics of Cotter's that are here reproduced, one will agree with the present writer that, although the poet's color be black, he deserves a deal of recognition from those who care for clever verse, if not poetry of the highest order.

The Kentucky Negro, it is interesting at this time to note, has his representatives in the major departments of literature. In history and biography he is represented by John H. Jackson and William J. Simmons; in fiction by W. W. Brown and A. A. Whitman; and in poetry, both lyric and dramatic, by George M. McClellan, Henry A. Laine, and Joseph S. Cotter.

Joseph Seamon Cotter, the ablest Negro writer Kentucky has produced, was born near Bardstown, Ky., in 1861. He had not a Tuskegee to attend, so he worked at the hardest manual labor in the day and attended a night school in Louisville. He has educated himself so successfully that he is at the present time Principal of the Eighth Street Colored School in Louisville. He has won the respect of many of Louisville's foremost citizens by his modest life and poetic output.

Cotter has published three books. His first, entitled "Links of Friendship," appeared in 1898; his second, called "Caleb, The Degenerate," is a four-act drama; and

his latest book, issued in 1909, "A White Song and a Black One." A rather creditable showing for a Kentucky Negro, is it not?

From "A White Song and a Black One," this little lyric is selected for reproduction—the very cleverest thing that Cotter has done.

NEGRO LOVE SONG.

I lobes your hands, gal; yes I do.
 (I'se gwine to wed ter-morro').
 I lobes your earnings thro' an' thro'.
 (I'se gwine ter wed ter-morro').
 Now, heah de truf. I'se mos' nigh broke;
 I wants ter take you fer my yoke;
 So let's go wed ter-morro'.

 Now, don't look shy, an' don't say no.
 (I'se gwine ter wed ter-morro').
 I hope you don't expects er sho'
 When we two weds ter-morro'.
 I needs er licens—you knows I do—
 I'll borrow de price ob de same frum you,
 An' den we weds ter-morro'.

 How pay you back? In de reg'ler way.
 When you becomes my honey
 You'll habe myself fer de princ'pal pay,
 An' my faults fer de interes' money.
 Dat suits you well? Dis cash is right.
 So we two weds ter-morro' night,
 An' you wuks all de ter-morro's.

Shortly before his death the greatest of Negro writers—if we except the French Dumas and the Russian Pushkin—Paul Lawrence Dunbar, came to Kentucky and gave readings from his poems in the principal cities of the State. When he returned to his home in Dayton, Ohio, he wrote this poem, now published in his "Lyrics of Lowly Life":

AFTER A VISIT.

I be'n down in ole Kentucky
 Fur a week er two, an' say.
 'T wuz ez hard ez breakin' oxen
 Fur to tear myse'f away

Allus argerin' 'bout fren'ship
 An' yer hospitality—
 Y' ain't no right to talk about it
 Tell you be'n down there to see.

See jest how they give you welcome
 To the best that's in the land,
 Feel the sort o' grip they give you
 When they take you by the hand.
 Hear 'em say, "We're glad to have you,
 Better stay a week er two;"
 An' the way they treat you makes you
 Feel that ev'ry word is true.

Feed you tell you hear the buttons
 Crackin' on yore Sunday vest;
 Haul you roun' to see the wonders
 Tell you have to cry for rest.
 Drink yer health an' pet an' praise you
 Tell you git to feel ez great
 Ez the Sheriff o' the county
 Er the Gov'ner o' the State.

Wife, she sez I must be crazy
 'Cause I go on so, an' Nelse
 He 'lows, "Goodness gracious! daddy,
 Cain't you talk about nuthin' else?"
 Well, pleg-gone it, I'm jes' tickled,
 Bein' tickled ain't no sin;
 I be'n down in ole Kentucky,
 An' I wan o' go ag'in.

COTTER'S RESPONSE TO DUNBAR.

Here is Cotter's reply to "After a Visit:"

So, you be'n to ole Kentucky,
 An' you want to go ag'in?
 Well, Kentucky 'll doff her kerchief
 An' politely ask you in.
 An' she'll loosen from her girdle
 What perhaps you didn't see—
 Keys that fit the other cupboards
 Of her hospitality.

Not that she's inclined to hold back
 With the good and give the worst;
 But, you know, in all fair dealin',

What is first must be the first,
 So, when she takes key the second
 An' gives it a twist er two
 (Maybe I ought not to say it),
 It'll most nigh startle you.

An' then keys the third and fourth, sir,
 (Not to speak of all the rest)
 Wouldn't stop at crackin' buttons,
 They'd jest smash that Sunday vest.
 And your happiness would find, sir,
 A momentum then and there
 'That would carry it a-sweepin'
 Through the stronghold of despair.

Now, the grippin' o' the hand, sir,
 An' the welcome that you say
 Was so firm an' true an' all that
 Has a kind o' curious way.
 At the first it's sorter slow like,
 Till it forms a league with you,
 Then it makes a kind o' circuit
 That jest thrills you thro' an thro'.

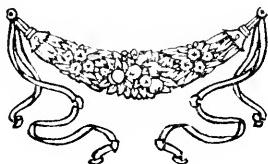
But it may be I had better
 Not discuss this aftermath
 Fur it might stir up your feelings
 To the righteous point of wrath
 As you brood o'er what you lost, sir,
 By not stayin' with us longer.
 Ah, well, come to see us often,
 Ole Kentucky 'll make you stronger.

So, you be'n to ole Kentucky,
 An' you want to go ag'in ?
 Well, Kentucky's standin' waitin'
 Jest to take you wholly in,
 An' she'll loosen her vast girdle
 So that you can fully see
 All the roots, fruits, leaves, an' branches
 Of her hospitality.

Charles J. O'Malley, the Kentucky poet and critic, stated the difference between Dunbar and Cotter: "Dunbar, perhaps, displays more of the poet's stock-in-trade, blue skies, bird-songs, brooks, roses, green grass; Cotter, we

incline to think, soberer thought, deeper philosophy, and certainly a clearer spiritual insight." Alfred Austin, Israel Zangwill, and Madison Cawein have also praised Cotter's work.

Daniel W. Davis, the Virginian, William Stanley Braithwaite, the New Englander, and Joseph S. Cotter, the Kentuckian, compose the trio of American Negro poets that is entitled to be regarded as Dunbar's only real successor in song.



REV. LONDON FERRILL

*Kentucky's
Greatest Negro Preacher*

London Ferrill, the most noted Negro preacher that Kentucky has produced, was born in Hanover county, Virginia, in 1789. His birthplace was a short distance from the old home of Henry Clay. Ferrill was the slave of Mrs. Ann Winston, and his mother was the property of Richard Ferrill. Mrs. Winston's brother, Richard Ferrill, was born in England but early came to America, where he accumulated a large estate. At his death his property went to Mrs. Winston. Her slaves bore her maiden name of Ferrill, and she gave the subject of this sketch the Christian name of London, in honor of the city of her birth, London, England.

When London Ferrill was nine years of age his mistress died, and he was sold to Colonel Samuel Overton, an old Virginia gentleman of the black stock, for six hundred dollars. Colonel Overton did not buy London's mother, so parent and child were separated for many years.

At the age of eleven years, London and a companion came very near being drowned in a little river near Colonel Overton's estate. They were rescued, however, and left the river with profound thoughts of life, death, eternity, surging in their minds. The experience straightened London out in his moral life, and gave him his first thoughts of the ministry as a life work. This recalls the old story of John Wesley, who was saved from the burning rectory at Epworth, England, a few moments before the roof fell.

Some months after this episode, Ferrill was bound out to Edmund Daily to learn the house-joinery business. During his apprenticeship he was converted to the Christian religion, and at the age of twenty he was baptized by the Rev. Absalom Waller. From that date began his church career, which concluded only with his death. He soon began to preach, and was known throughout the Slashes as "as great a preacher as Andrew Broaddus"—an able Virginia divine.

Colonel Overton heard of his slave's promising work, and decided to give him a systematic education. But his decision was never carried out, as he died shortly after having made it. Ferrill, however, added line upon line, precept upon precept, and it was not long before his discourses were highly intelligent.

His master had not long been in his grave when Ferrill determined to leave Virginia. He first thought of settling in New York City or Philadelphia, but finally concluded to make Kentucky his future home. He and his wife, who had purchased his freedom, bought "a Yankee wagon and two horses," and began the long journey over the old Wilderness Road to the baby Blue Grass State. There were very few houses along the route of travel, and at night, many miles away from any dwelling, he and his faithful wife were often serenaded by the howl of wolf and bear. They at length arrived in Kentucky and took up their abode some four miles from Lexington. After a few months, however, they moved into the little city.

Ferrill's first preaching in Lexington was done in the weaving-room of Thomas Hart, the father-in-law of Henry Clay. One of these discourses was heard by a company of white persons who admitted his accurate knowledge of the Scriptures, but agreed that his grammar was incorrect. They arranged a conference for him with the learned James McChord, the Presbyterian pastor of this city, who told him many things that were invaluable to him in his future career.

Ferrill frequently preached in private houses during his first years in the "Athens of the West," and his fame soon

reached the ears of the Town Trustees, who engaged him to minister to the entire colored population of Lexington. The Sabbath following, their action was concurred in by the Negroes themselves. Soon after, his congregation went further and elected him as their pastor for life, but he insisted on a clause in the contract that allowed him to sever relations whenever dissatisfaction arose in the church, which was agreed to.

The beginning of his ministry in Lexington was marked by incidents that try men's souls. He had enemies galore, but he also had many warm, devoted friends, who, with the grace of God and his great will power, gave him victory. During the first month of his pastorate he had thirty converts, but he could not baptize them until he had been regularly ordained by the Elkhorn Baptist Association, which also gave him full power to perform any religious ceremony. And on the next Sabbath, he buried his converts with Christ in baptism.

A short time after this, Ferrill's arch enemy, Harry Quill, attempted to have him sent back to Virginia under the Kentucky law which allowed a free colored person to remain in this State but thirty days, unless he or she was a Kentuckian-born. But a few of his white friends—and he had more than any Negro Kentucky has produced—presented a petition to the General Assembly asking that he be permitted to remain in Kentucky, and it was granted.

On June 1, 1833, cholera came to Lexington, and London Ferrill and Bishop Smith, of the Episcopal Church, were the only ministers who remained in the city. While William ("King") Solomon of Kentucky, was the real hero of the plague, and throughout it "he ruled like an unterrified king," he was ably seconded by Ferrill, Smith, Benjamin Gratz, General Leslie Combs, John Keizer, Jr., and others.

On June 11, Ferrill's wife died, and the next day saw thirteen persons at her bier—the very largest funeral of the entire cholera plague.

After killing some five hundred persons, the awful disease subsided in Lexington by the middle of July, and Fer-

rill went into Fayette county to aid the sick and dying and to do whatever good he could.

London Ferrill was the founder and first pastor of the First Baptist Church for colored people in Lexington, which stands today at the corner of East Short and Deweese streets. From 1833 to his death in 1854 "he continued to preach, baptizing in the Ohio river at Maysville and Covington, in Elkhorn, Town Fork, and in all the ponds for miles around Lexington." Throughout his ministry he baptized about five thousand persons.

By his will he left his property to his adopted children. This will, which was witnessed by James O. Harrison and Francis K. Hunt, two of Lexington's great lawyers, is preserved in the Fayette county clerk's office. Shortly before his death, he handed this prayer to his anonymous biographer:

"May the great Father of Heaven and earth bless the citizens of Richmond, Virginia, for their kindness toward me in my youthful days, but more particularly, O Lord, be merciful to the citizens of Lexington, Kentucky, and may it please Thee to bless, preserve, and keep them from sin. Guide them in all their walks; make them peaceable, happy and truly religious; and when they come to lie down on the bed of death, may Thy good Spirit hover around ready to waft their ransomed souls to Thy good presence. Lord, grant this for Christ's sake; and O God, bless the Church of which I am pastor, and govern it with Thy unerring wisdom, and keep it a church as long as time shall last. And, O my Master! choose, when I am gone, choose some pastor for them who may be enabled to labor with more zeal than your most humble petitioner has ever done, and grant that it may continue to prosper and do good among the colored race. And, Merciful Father, bless the white people who have always treated me as though I were a white man; and bless, I pray Thee, all those who, through envy or malice, have

mistreated me, and save them—is my prayer. Bless the Church of Christ everywhere—bless Christians in every land—bless, O Lord, my two adopted children, and keep them in Thy way—bring all sinners, in all countries, to feel their need of a Savior, and pardon all their sins; and when they come to die, take them unto Thyself, and the glory shall be to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, forever and ever. Amen.”

London Ferrill died in Lexington, October 12, 1854, about five weeks before King Solomon’s death. And this fact shatters the good old tradition that Ferrill pronounced the benediction at Solomon’s funeral. General Leslie Combs may have delivered a brief eulogy at Solomon’s grave, but another than Ferrill pronounced the benediction.

The Lexington Observer and Reporter, one of the best of the early Lexington newspapers, published this notice of his passing :

“We are truly pained to be called upon to announce the death of London Ferrill, the great colored minister of the Gospel, so long a respected and venerable citizen of this place. He departed this life on Thursday morning last, at his residence near the African Baptist Church, of which he had been pastor for over a quarter of a century, beloved as he will be lamented by his numerous congregation and by our community. He had been in feeble health for some time, but continued to perform his pastoral duties till within the last few days; and when his lamp of life went out, it was with the full confidence that it would be relumed from that everlasting luminary whose brightness will never diminish.”

The other Lexington paper, the Kentucky Statesman, for October 13, 1854, contained this obituary :

“DEATH OF A GOOD MAN.

“On yesterday morning, the 12th instant, Rev. London Ferrill, a colored man, died in this city, suddenly, from a disease of the heart. The deceased, at the time of his

death, was pastor of the First Baptist Church of colored persons in this city, and had labored in that capacity with great zeal and much apparent profit to the cause of religion for many years. He was a meek, earnest, consistent and devoted follower of Christ and preacher of His word, and had been so for about forty years, being at the time of his death in the sixty-fifth year of his age.

"London Ferrill was born in Virginia, a slave; but after his conversion obtained his freedom. He removed from Virginia to Lexington over thirty years since; and by his labors in the ministry has built up one of the largest congregations, we presume, in the United States. His communicants numbered, a short time since, eighteen hundred and twenty; all, or most of whom, joined his church under his preaching. The consistency of his conduct, and his intelligent comprehension of the Scriptures, attracted the attention of the Baptist Church in this city, a few years after he came to Kentucky; and he was regularly ordained to preach the gospel. During his ministry, from first to last, he baptized upward of five thousand persons.

"But he rests from his labors, and his works do follow him. He had justly acquired an immense influence among the colored people of this city and surrounding country, and he always exercised this influence with prudence and for the furtherance of good morals and religion. It will be difficult to supply his place. The branch of the church in which he ministered has sustained in him a great loss which will be severely felt by the colored people. He has gone to meet his reward; and the reward is such as awaits the good man."

A funeral notice, neatly printed on note paper with a black border (a copy of which was preserved by Martha Lee, deceased, for many years a respected colored woman of this city, and who was a member of his church) reads :

"FUNERAL.

"Yourself and family are requested to attend the funeral of Rev. London Ferrill (Late pastor of the First Col-

ored Baptist Church), from his late residence on Short street, to the Episcopal burying ground, on Sunday afternoon next, at half-past two o'clock.

"Lexington, October 13, 1854."

Ferrill's funeral was the largest, save Henry Clay's, in the history of Lexington. The Statesman for October 17, said :

"The funeral of Rev. London Ferrill, the colored preacher on Sunday last, was attended by an immense concourse of colored people. There were about seventy carriages and other vehicles in the procession, all filled to their utmost capacity, besides a very lengthy procession of persons on foot, four abreast, and some forty or fifty on horseback. It is thought there could not have been less than from four to five thousand persons in attendance upon the funeral, most of whom followed the remains of the deceased to the grave. We have never seen a more orderly or better behaved concourse of people on any occasion."

The little biography of Ferrill, of which mention has already been made, was published a short time before the death of its subject. But it was reprinted by the Kentucky Gazette in 1878 ; and Martha Lee's copy lies before me now. The Gazette for March 6, 1878, contained a notice of its reprinting, and a short eulogy of Ferrill. The notice commended the history of his "blameless and useful life" to the generations since his death, and concluded with the recital of this incident, which will also serve as our conclusion :

We well remember a conversation in reference to Brother Ferrill and the institution of slavery which we had on a Long Island Sound steamer with Sir William Howe, Governor-General of the British Province of Nova Scotia, in 1857, and the matter in which he applauded Brother Ferrill's marriage ceremony for slaves, uniting them "till death or distance did them part." His Excellency said it evinced wonderful good sense and a true and scriptural appreciation of the marriage relationship.

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